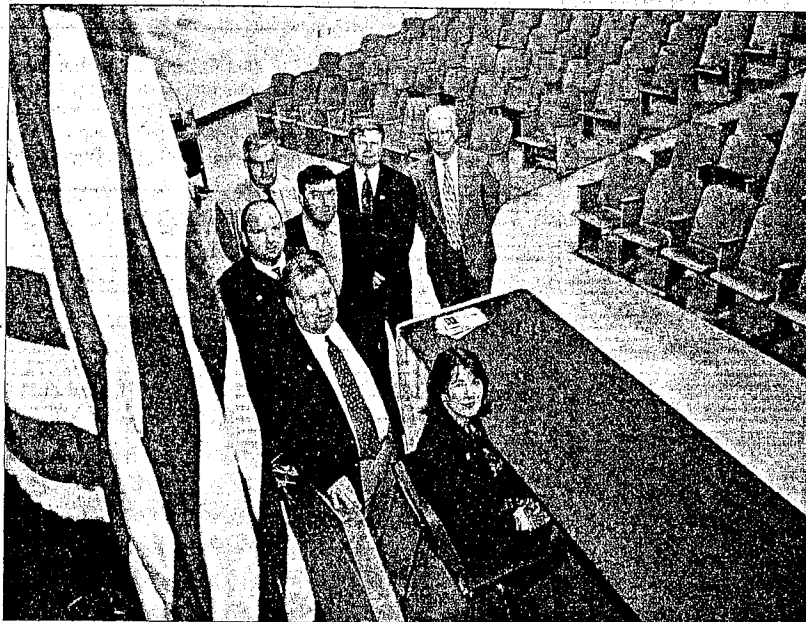


W.W. truants beware



Daily Times photo/Ryan T. Conaty

Clockwise from bottom are West Warwick Truancy Court Magistrate Angela Bucci, Family Court Chief Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah Jr., West Warwick School Superintendent David Raiche, School Committeeman John Flynn, School Committee Chairman Daniel Burns, School Committeeman Jeff Kos and Chairman of the Board of Regents James DiPrete.

Bunking school will net you a day in court

By RYAN BURR
Daily Times Staff Reporter

ARCTIC — West Warwick High School has declared a war — against truancy.

Rhode Island will institute a family truancy court in the school auditorium starting Nov. 7. The court will adjudicate all matters of absenteeism, officials announced yesterday.

West Warwick School Superintendent David Raiche says this new system will be more practical than the previous method of dealing with truant students, which was through Kent County Court.

"This way, students won't have to miss school just to attend a truancy hearing," Raiche said. "Here, we can handle these matters in 15 minutes, so students would only be missing 15 minutes of class time."

The court, which exists in about a half-dozen other school districts in the state, involves efforts from local school departments and mental health

providers not only to reduce the truancy rate, but to provide a more stable learning environment.

"Truancy often starts with problems at home — like not having a proper diet or living in poor conditions. This discourages kids from being productive in school," he said. "We can change that cycle by working with parents, if need be, to provide support services. I believe this new court system will create a more successful cycle in students' lives."

One of the program's features is parental involvement and guidance, as well as after-school programming.

The system will be aimed mostly at students of Deering Middle School, but officials said the court will work with some high school and even elementary school students.

The court will operate like this: Once a child misses 10 or more days of school unexcused, a truant officer files a petition with

See TRUANCY, Page A-2

TRUANCY

Continued from Page A-1

the Family Court Juvenile Clerk's office and the case is heard within two to three weeks. Parents are required to attend.

Raiche said the school had to request consideration for an in-school truancy court from Rhode Island Family Court. "One of the factors the court looks at is if there is a high number of truancy petitions, which our district has," he said.

The magistrate for the court will be Angela Bucci, who will

hear cases each Wednesday. "This is my first time working in a school and I'm very excited to get started," she said.

Rhode Island Family Court Chief Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah Jr. said he is confident the new court in West Warwick High School will lower the truancy rate.

"In the school districts (where) this has been implemented, the attendance rate has increased from about 49 percent to 89 percent," he said, adding that "Bucci

has excellent qualifications to handle work in this school."

Nationally, 25 percent of public school principals report absenteeism to be a serious or somewhat serious problem, according to Rhode Island Kids Count.

In Rhode Island, 1,082 students were suspended for truancy in the 1998-1999 school year; 4,720 were suspended for skipping class, the organization also reported.